

**AGENDA FOR CHANGE: AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER  
ST. LAWRENCE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST DISTRICT  
SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL – JANUARY 2009**

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(Deadline for February issue is February 1)

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**SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR 2009**

**January 19:** Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service

**January 20:** Inauguration of Barrack Hussein Obama as 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States

**January 22:** 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision.

**February 26 – March 1:** First International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women and Progressive Women of Faith. For information [www.icuuw.com:80](http://www.icuuw.com:80)

**March 21-24, 2009:** Sexuality Education Advocacy Training in Washington, DC. For information go to [www.uua.org/SEAT](http://www.uua.org/SEAT).

**March 22, 2009:** Interfaith Impact of NYS Forum – “The Healthy Teens Act” – First Universalist Church of Rochester

**April 1-5, 2009:** Re-envisioning Economic Justice in the New Era (20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference of Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community). Rowe Camp and Conference Center. For information call Marcia Meyers (503-665-3957) or visit web site at <http://www.uujec.org>. To register go to <http://www.uujec.org/register.pdf>.

**April 24-26:** St. Lawrence District Assembly, Albany. Social Justice Council workshop led by Aaron Payson, “**When Emergencies Happen. A Guide to Congregational Preparedness.**” Aaron is Response Coordinator for The Unitarian Universalist Trauma Response Ministry.

**April 28:** Equality and Justice Day in Albany – Empire State Pride Agenda ([www.prideagenda.org/Our Programs/Equality and Justice Day/](http://www.prideagenda.org/Our_Programs/Equality_and_Justice_Day/))

**June 24-28:** Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly – Salt Lake City, Utah

## SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR 2009 (continued)

**November 7: “Doing Justice in an Economic Tsunami”** will be the theme of the 2009 annual conference of SJC to be held at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Amherst Saturday, November 7. Flyers and registration will be available at the District Assembly.

### NEW YORK STATE ISSUES

#### Governor Says New York Is in a Perilous Situation

Excerpted from an article by Danny Hakim and Nicholas Confessore – January 8

“The governor’s speech contained little in the way of new policy initiatives, partly because there is scant money available to pay for new programs and partly because Mr. Paterson already rolled out his budget plan in mid-December — more than a month early — in anticipation of a bitter budget battle this year. He did announce several new proposals intended to fight obesity, including a ban on **trans fats** in restaurants and a requirement that restaurant chains post information on the calories in their offerings. The proposals, which would require legislative approval, follow similar programs in New York City and California. Mr. Paterson said he would seek to ban junk food sales in public schools and to lend state money to green markets willing to open in poor communities. The governor has already unveiled a plan to impose an 18 percent tax on sugary sodas. . . . And he reiterated plans to expand health care coverage and create a new higher education loan program.

From a *New York Times* editorial January 8: “Over the last few months, Gov. David Paterson of New York has been handing out gloomier and gloomier news. Confronted with a huge budget deficit and an economy getting shakier by the day, he has announced plans to slash or at least defer almost everybody’s favorite state program. But on Wednesday, in his first State of the State address since taking over in March from Eliot Spitzer, Governor Paterson talked about things he wanted to do, not undo. “Mr. Paterson also spoke at length about health care. One important proposal would allow employees to expand private health care coverage to dependents up to age 29, a quick way of providing health coverage for an age group that is notoriously underinsured. “Mr. Paterson promised to reform the outdated, counterproductive Rockefeller drug laws and provide more loans for college-bound students. He has also proposed a cap on property taxes. The most glaring omission was any plan for real political reform. He did not mention the need to change the campaign finance system or the scandalous way legislators draw their own districts. This was a missed opportunity in an otherwise promising summons to confront New York’s historic challenges.”

Governor Paterson forwarded his “45 by 15” program, pledging that by 2015 New York will meet 45 percent of its electricity needs through improved energy efficiency and clean renewable energy. He hopes to create “a clearinghouse to serve as a single point of access for information on all energy efficiency programs for schools, hospitals, and local governments. . . . the clearinghouse will coordinate the dissemination of energy information around the State. He estimates such a program will not only lower costs of energy but also create an estimated 50,000 new jobs. The Governor envisions a “New York Energy Policy Institute to coordinate the necessary knowledge base and expertise of our higher education institutions.”

## **Interfaith Impact of NYS Update - January 15, 2009 2009--The Change is Real and the Time is Now!**

Robb Smith, Executive Director, Interfaith Impact of NYS

This year, with the change in the leadership of the New York State Senate from Republican to Democratic, our progressive religious voice for the common good is more important than ever before. For decades, the Senate Democrats have been making promises. Now we need to help them keep those promises. The IINYS presence in Albany is one way we will do that, but as NYS Comptroller Tom DiNapoli said recently, "build relationships with your representatives back in your district office. That's how they get the reinforcement they need on your issues."

Another way we reinforce our values is through phone calls, letters and e-mails. This year, IINYS is going to pump up the volume by offering e-advocacy. This is a system that lets you register once on our web site and then--in response to IINYS alerts--send e-mails to your legislators with a few mouse clicks. For the first time, mass e-advocacy will reinforce progressive religious values in New York.

Here are a few of the issues we will be working on together in the coming months:

- ***Reproductive Health:*** On the first working day of the new Legislature, President Pro Tem and Majority Leader Sen. Malcolm Smith promised to make passage of the Healthy Teens Act and the Reproductive Health Act top priorities. At the same time, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver promised to pass the Healthy Teens Act and the Emergency Contraception Act. All these bills are top priorities for Interfaith Impact.
- ***LGBT Rights:*** Sen. Smith said that reform in the Senate cannot include bargaining away civil rights. We applaud that statement, and we will continue to work with legislative leaders from both parties and our allies across the state to get the votes needed to bring the marriage equality bill to the floor of the Senate for passage. This year, we also hope to see the Dignity for All Students Act and the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act passed.
- ***Economic Justice:*** The Governor's FY 2009-2010 budget contains a 10% increase to the basic public assistance grant each year for the next three years. The basic amount has not been raised in 18 years. IINYS and our allies in the Faith and Hunger Network (Reform Jewish Voice, Focus Churches, NYS Catholic Conference of Bishops, Hunger Action Network, NYS Episcopal Public Policy Network, and the NYS Council of Churches) have been meeting with Executive Chamber staff for the past two years about this, providing facts and initiating a moral dialog. During our last meeting with the State Director of Operations and the Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare, they told us the Governor realized it is a moral issue. It was good to hear our moral argument resonate in the Executive Chamber. Now we'll have to make sure it resonates in both houses of the Legislature. IINYS will submit written testimony in support of this budget item to the joint legislative hearing on the human services budget.
- ***Reform of the Rockefeller Era Drug Laws:*** In his State of the State message, Governor David Paterson promised major reforms of the unfair Rockefeller era drug laws. These Draconian laws criminalizing possession of small amounts of illegal drugs have had a devastating impact on minority communities across the state. A report from the

Commission on Sentencing Reform will be out soon, and with that as a basis, we can expect the Governor and Legislature to finally move toward real reform.

- **Universal Health Care:** The Urban Institute Report on Universal Health Care will be out soon. This report is expected to provide econometric models of various approaches to health care in New York, including single payer, New York Health Care Plus and Massachusetts type plans.
- **Bigger Better Bottle Bill:** Among other things, this bill would require deposits on water bottles that currently litter the landscape and clog landfills. It's time for this to pass.

We are also making increased use of the bulletin board on our web site, [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org). There you can access up-to-the-minute information, discuss issues, and review a calendar of opportunities for progressive advocacy. I hope you will make use of this option. The more we communicate, the more powerful we are.

[robb@interfaithimpactnys.org](mailto:robb@interfaithimpactnys.org) - [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org)

*Interfaith Impact of NYS: working for the common good through progressive religious advocacy*

## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION NEWS

### The UUA Washington Office for Advocacy (UUAWOA)

Each month, the UUA implements an **Action of the Month** campaign to engage UUs in accomplishing concrete objectives that reflect UU values. Following are the Actions for January through March: **January -- Living Wage:** Bring the minimum wage closer to a living wage by supporting the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign to raise the federal minimum wage to \$10 in 2010 (see below). **February -- BGLT Equality:** Visit your Representative or Senator and ask them to support BGLT equality. **March -- Comprehensive Sex Education** - coinciding with the annual Sexuality Education and Advocacy Training, which teaches members how to be effective advocates for comprehensive sexuality education. For more information on these Actions of the Month, visit [www.uua.org/socialjustice](http://www.uua.org/socialjustice). **Attached** is an update from the UUA Washington Office.

The UUA has developed a statement on the tragic events in **Gaza** and urges our congregations:

- To add their voices to Churches for Middle East Peace's [current advocacy efforts](#), and to participate with local interfaith colleagues witnessing for an end to the violence and a return to peacemaking.
- To remember, during worship, the terrible pain and suffering of innocent people in the region.
- To educate themselves and their congregations about the history and complexity of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.
- To support humanitarian efforts in Gaza by making donations through the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's [Gaza Humanitarian Crisis Fund](#).
- To make use of our Association's 'Peacemaking' resources.
- To share stories of congregational engagement with the UUA.
- To share [comments and feedback](#) to the UUA's [Commission on Social Witness](#).

Read the full statement at [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org)

## Let Justice Roll National Campaign

The Unitarian Universalist Association and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee are members of the interfaith [Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign](#), a nonpartisan coalition of more than 90 faith, community, labor and business organizations. Let Justice Roll played a lead role in winning the current federal increase of \$6.55 per hour (the first raise in ten years) that will be raised to \$7.25 per hour in 2009. Even after the minimum wage rises to \$7.25 in July 2009, it will be far below the minimum wage of 1968. Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, has launched the "\$10 in 2010" campaign to raise the federal minimum wage to \$10 an hour in 2010.

### Take Action

- Hold a [Living Wage Worship Service or Community Event](#)
- Please [Sign Up](#) for Living Wage Days
- Sign & Gather Signatures for [Faith Leaders](#), [General Public](#) & [Business Leaders](#) Letter to Congress for Delivery to the New Congress in 2009
- Make sure your congregation is or plans to be paying all employees at least \$10 per hour by the end of 2010

### Resources

- New [Living Wage Days Worship & Event Resource Guide](#) with worship resources, including a UU section, fact sheets; policy points; youth activities and more!
- [UUA Living Wage Resources](#)
- 2008 Action of Immediate Witness: [Raise the Federal Minimum Wage to \\$10 in 2010](#)
- Skinner Sermon Award Winner: [Why No Living Wage?](#) (PDF, 7 pages)

## UUSC AND GAZA

UUSC MEMO: The humanitarian crisis in Gaza becomes more desperate with each passing day. More than 700 Palestinians have been killed, and hundreds of thousands more civilians are in grave danger not only from military action but from disease and hunger because of the lack of relief aid. [Donate now to UUSC's Gaza Humanitarian Crisis Fund](#). UUSC is especially concerned for the safety and well-being of the civilians in Gaza who are now caught in the middle of a destructive military operation and have no place to seek safety.

A ceasefire must be established immediately to enable vital humanitarian aid to reach civilians and protect them from further harm. [Take action now to urge President Bush, your elected senators and representatives in Congress, and the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations to use all their resources and influence to work with the international community for an immediate end to the hostilities](#). The military action and the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Gaza are having a devastating impact on the civilian population. The current fighting and bombing in Gaza drastically impede the distribution of the limited aid stocks in the area and obstruct the cross-border delivery of additional and urgently needed aid.

UUSC believes that it is crucial for the United States to work with the international community to insist on an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. Only then can humanitarian aid and medical assistance be provided and people reach safety. The current crisis is the latest manifestation of long-standing hostility and violence between Palestine and Israel, and underscores the urgency for a political solution. Your support and action can influence our government to take a more affirmative leadership role in working with the international community to effect an immediate ceasefire and promote negotiations to achieve a lasting and just peace. To read the complete UUSC policy statement on the Gaza humanitarian crisis, [visit here](#) or see the attached.

## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

### UUSC, Human Rights, and the Presidential Election

Shelley Moskowitz, UUSC Manager of Public Policy, has reviewed the results of the 2008 presidential election. She noted that the election was a culmination of years of grassroots work, showing us the efficacy and importance of grassroots campaigning.



In New Hampshire, UUSC's 501(c)(4) organization, *JustDemocracy* played a major role in engaging progressive, faith-based communities in several key counties. *JustDemocracy* organized people around issues of war, peace, and climate change. It is now clear that strategic faith-based work can make a difference on issues that matter to us. The work we are doing through *JustDemocracy* is building a base that will continue to push on critical issues and hold our elected representatives accountable.

Now there is a real opportunity to make progress on the policy goals we have held for so long. Senate-election results have led UUSC staff to expect more robust debate and less delay on action on key human-rights issues. As we consider members of the Obama transition team, it appears to us that there is a seriousness of purpose, a true intent to make progress.

The ballot initiatives that successfully restricted marriage equality, however, show us that more work remains to be done. We can not assume that people share our perspective on what is a civil right. Groups like UUSC must redouble their efforts to achieve the change they hope for.

UUSC recently sent an e-mail to supporters inviting them to take part in an action organized by the *National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT)*, calling on Obama to pass an executive order banning torture. UUSC will continue to work with our partner, *NRCAT*, on this key issue. UUSC is also carefully watching for opportunities for environmental legislative advocacy. We will be quick to engage our members and supporters in key efforts.

For more information, contact Jack Maniloff ([jkmf@mail.rochester.edu](mailto:jkmf@mail.rochester.edu)), St. Lawrence District UUSC Regional Coordinator, or go to the UUSC web site ([www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org)).

## **EDITORIAL: THE MORAL STATE OF THE NATION OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT OBAMA**

Dear President Obama: In the *Republic* Plato wrote that democracy is “a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder.” H. L. Mencken said, “I do not believe in democracy; but I am perfectly willing to admit that it provides the only really amusing form of government ever endured by (humanity).” And comic Will Rogers explained, “I don’t make jokes: I just watch the government and report the facts.” So it seems to be as you begin your presidency.

Each January the President delivers a State of the Union Address, an intriguing mixture of campaign stump speech, lecture and sermon. It often represents a triumph of hope over experience. As one cynic observes, the promises uttered are often the political equivalent of junk bonds. Yours is a daunting task. I do not envy you.

As you prepare your address, I urge you to reflect on the *moral* state of the nation, taking as your guide the image of the Lord’s plumb line over the nation Israel in the Book of Amos. As a carpenter uses a plumb line to true-up the work, it can be used to critique the nation’s ethical health. Mr. President, the Hebrew prophets, including Jesus of Nazareth, sought to speak truth to power. They did not content themselves with an unjust status quo simple because it was well nigh impossible to change. Unlike the prophets I do not believe God whispered in my ear telling me what to say; but like the prophets I seek to drop the plumb line of my understanding of justice, equity and compassion over my church, my community, my nation, my world. I will communicate my findings to you many times over the next several years.

I would urge you to read the thoughtful words of Abraham Lincoln, who clearly understood the need for humility in high places. Speaking to a group of ministers about the Civil War in 1862 he said: “I am approached with the most opposite opinions and advice, and that by religious men who are equally certain that they represent the divine will. I hope it will not be irreverent for me to say that if it is probably that God would reveal his will to others, on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed that he would reveal it directly to me. . . . These are not, however, the days of miracles. . . I must study the plain, physical facts of the case, ascertain what is possible, and learn what appears to be wise and right.”

I believe the moral state of our nation is deeply troubled and there are many candidates for blame. However, I once read about a class assignment to name the most detrimental problems in our society: poverty, racism, war, sexism, economic imbalance, crime, etc. Next day the class was asked to name the causes: politics, institutions, corporations, capitalism, collectivism. Not one member of the class listed himself or herself as a cause of society's problems. But our first step toward justice, always, is a look at the face in the mirror. May you do this often, even as I often view myself and urge my fellow citizens to do likewise.

Oscar Wilde once wrote: “The trouble with socialism is that it takes too many evenings.” The same might be said of democracy - it takes up too many evenings. Our response as citizens will tell just how seriously we take our liberal religious faith and our democracy. Theodore Parker summed it up in these words: “Democracy is not what we have. It’s what we do.” Good luck!

Sincerely yours, Richard S. Gilbert

## **Services Offered by the Social Justice Council 2008-2009**

Contact [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org) or 585-244-7403 for further information:

Listed below are brief descriptions of social justice workshops, sermons, talks and consultations I offer to SLD congregations and clusters. Unless otherwise stated, these programs can be formatted for an entire day or a half-day.

### **Up to Our Steeples in Politics**

What is the proper relationship between church and state? Politics and religion? Faith and social action? Election year or not congregations ought to know the “real rules” of what churches can and cannot do in the public arena.

### **Walking the Talk: Basic Workshop in Congregational Social Justice**

Unitarian Universalists are eloquent in talking about peace and social justice. However, we have our problems in “walking the talk.” This workshop explores the spiritual roots of social action, a perspective on the unique UU mission, organizational tools for a congregation and a practicum on planning for change. Participants are asked to come with a Congregational Self-Analysis Survey completed. This workshop is designed as a fundamental orientation to congregation-based social action.

### **“Giving Life the Shape of Justice”: A Level Two Workshop**

These words from our Unitarian Universalist song “Spirit of Life,” are central to the task we face as justice-makers. The workshop is designed for congregations which have developed social justice programs, but would like to evaluate and expand them. This workshop is in effect a consultation.

### **Being the Change We Want to See: A Workshop on Spiritual Growth**

Ghandi once said that we have to be the change we want to see. In working on society, we first work on ourselves – what does that entail? This workshop explores the process of spiritual growth through peace and justice work. Participants will be invited to tell their stories and gain perspective on their personal narratives.

### **The Prophetic Imperative: Organizing for Change**

An exploration of the history, theology, ethics and sociology of social change through Dick Gilbert’s book, *The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice*. This program requires a full weekend.

### **From Principles to Politics with Justice**

A workshop on religious advocacy. How does advocacy differ from lobbying? How do we mobilize our people to apply our ethical principles to the social order? What are the pitfalls? Should we do it at all? How do we respond to the effective advocacy of the Religious Right? We’ll talk about how to mobilize the congregations in our district for more effective social action - through New York State Interfaith Impact.

## Should the Church Speak Out?

One of the most common and most controversial issues in faith-based social action is the corporate role of the church in the public square. Should a congregation take a stand? Does it violate individual conscience? If it does speak out, how? This workshop is a discussion of the pros and cons of speaking out and different ways to approach the problem.

### Issue-Oriented Workshops and/or Sermons/Talks

Politics in the Pulpit – Possibilities and Pitfalls

Does the Earth Have Moral Rights? An ethical exploration of environmental justice.

How Much Do We Deserve? An Exploration in Distributive (Economic) Justice

What Is a “Just War” – a UU Perspective on War and Peace

The Eighth Day of Creation: Darwin, Evolution and “Intelligent Design” –

A Conversation with the Religious Right

Growing People of Prophetic Power: Social Justice and Religious Education

Building the Beloved Community – in the Congregation and Beyond

The Jonah Complex: Why Should I Be Involved?

“War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning” – and Peace?

Justice-Making in the Empire State: Applying UU Values to NYS Issues

Martin Luther King, Jr. – Shaping the Conscience of the Nation

Meriting the Wind We Inherit: A History of UU Peace and Justice Work

The Social Gospel According to Jesus

The Moral State of the Nation: January 20, 2009 and Beyond

“No Consorting with Angels” – the Religious Life of Susan B. Anthony

Gentleness in Living: What Knoxville Can Teach Us

Reproductive Choice: Where Do We Go from Here?

### REQUEST FOR SERVICES FORM - St. Lawrence UU District - Social Justice Program

Please complete form and send to Dick Gilbert, SLD Social Justice Coordinator, at

[Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org) or call 585-244-7403 for further information

Requested Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Congregation or Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: (Street) \_\_\_\_\_

(City or town) \_\_\_\_\_ (Zip): \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Service: (See above or specify your request)

Sermon topic \_\_\_\_\_

Workshop (theme) \_\_\_\_\_

Lecture (topic) \_\_\_\_\_

Consultation (purpose) \_\_\_\_\_

Financial arrangements according to District policy (\$250 a day – SLD covers expenses):

Congregations are encouraged to utilize clusters to share expenses.

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**JOIN INTERFAITH IMPACT NOW!**  
Individual and Congregational Memberships Welcome

Interfaith Impact of New York State is a UUA-UUSC partner organization. The St. Lawrence District is an official member and UUs are active on the Board. Robb Smith of our Albany congregation is Executive Director - [robb@interfaithimpactnys.org](mailto:robb@interfaithimpactnys.org). We encourage individual Unitarian Universalists in New York State to join. We also encourage you to invite your congregation or social action group join as an organizational member. For your convenience a membership form is below. Phone: (518) 463-5652 - E-mail: [interfaithimpactnys@verizon.net](mailto:interfaithimpactnys@verizon.net)  
Background information on state issues at [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org)

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Please print or type:

Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation:  Protestant  Unitarian Universalist  Reform Synagogue  Other

Membership Dues Enclosed: Individual  \$10  \$20  \$30  \$40  Other  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation/organizations  \$50  \$200  \$300  Other (amount) \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to: Interfaith IMPACT of New York State  
and mail to: IINYS, 646 State Street, Albany, NY 12203

Your Assembly Member \_\_\_\_\_ Your State Senator \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your support

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